

FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE NAMBIKWARA INDIANS

by

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INTRODUCTION

101 The name of the Nambikwara appears in ethnological literature from the eighteenth century on; but it seems useless here for us to
● [114] compile references reduced to a more or less distorted citation of the tribal name and to the approximate indication of the territory occupied by the group. In fact, with the exception of the name, which seems to be a surname of Tupi (1) origin, the Nambikwara remained

1. Cf. below, page 129, footnote 1.

practically unknown until the time of their discovery in 1907, by General (then Colonel) Candidio Mariano da Silva Rondon. From this date on, we are directly or indirectly indebted to the Rondon Commission for all the information available concerning them.

000 It is known that in 1907 Colonel Rondon was given a commission by the Brazilian government to explore the territories which extend approximately 1,500 kilometers from the village of Diamantino to the Madeira River. This was to precede the construction of a strategic telegraph line connecting the federal capital with the frontier outposts of the northwest. In the course of a first expedition begun in 1907, Rondon succeeded in reaching the Juruena, principal source of the Tapajoz, unknown up to that time. This discovery took place the twentieth of October. A second expedition, begun in 1908, permitted the opening of a land route toward the Madeira. This was the first objective of the mission entrusted to General Rondon which
177 was realized on December 25, 1909. It was during these two expeditions that contact was established for the first time with the Nambikwara.

The laying of the telegraph line continued through the Indian territories from 1909 to about 1915. During this period and since, there have been regular, although intermittent, relations between the Indians and the members of the telegraph commission—construction

177 officers, soldiers /2/ and workmen. These contacts have continued since the completion of the work. They are always intermittent and are made especially by the stations whose service is assured by the Paressi Indians educated in care of the Commission.

- 114 Leaving aside several books and articles of anecdotal character written by certain collaborators of General Rondon, we are limited to the following works as the only sources of information concerning the Nambikwara Indians. First, the Rapport ethnologique, by General Rondon himself, and printed in Rio de Janeiro as one of the numerous official publications of the Commission under No. 2, 1911. Next must be cited the lectures of the same author which followed the Roosevelt-Rondon expedition to the Rio da Duvida (Portuguese edition: Missão Rondon, Rio de Janeiro, 1916; English edition: Lectures delivered by General Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, etc., Comissão Rondon, Publication No. 43). Recourse should also be made to an article by a young officer of the staff of General Rondon, Antonio Pyreneus de Souza ("Notas sobre os costumes dos Índios Nambikwaras," Revista do Museu Paulista, Vol. 12, 1920) and to the information scattered in the diverse reports of the Commission, published during and after the exploratory work, of which the most useful is doubtless that of Carnier (Rapport géologique et ethnologique, No. 23, Annexé 5). Some information will be found in the book of Theodore Roosevelt (Through the Brazilian Wilderness, Works, Vol. 6) and a short vocabulary in Max Schmidt ("Ergebnisse meiner zweijährigen Forschungsreise in Matto Grosso," Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, Vol. 40, 1929).

In 1912, the Director of the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro, Dr. Edgar Roquette Pinto, was authorized to join the Rondon Commission in the field to receive, examine, and report to the Museum the ethnographic collections made since the beginning of the work. This trip must have given Dr. Roquette Pinto the occasion to write and publish several articles and a book. Certainly the most important of the former is his communication to the International Congress of Americanists held in London in 1912 (Os Índios Nambikwara do Brasil Central); then, his communication to the Pan-American Congress at Washington (1917) under the title, Os Índios da Serra do Norte. The book, Rondonia (last edition: Cia Editora Nacional, Sao-Paulo, 1935) is almost entirely dedicated to the Nambikwara and represents our best source of information.

- 114 However, all the works mentioned in the preceding paragraphs contain various linguistic data—generally limited to mediocre vocabularies—and a description of material culture, carefully undertaken in Rondonia. Nowhere do they treat of family life and social organization. Under these circumstances it may be surprising that the Nambikwara seem to have been completely forgotten after the publication of the work of Roquette Pinto. It was natural that our own expedition, begun exactly
- 121 26 years and two months after /3/ the beginning of Roquette Pinto's trip, should be dedicated to filling in—even partially—the gaps of preceding research. We have sought more extensive and precise linguistic information; paid more attention to the "dynamic" aspect of the material culture, considering less the finished products than the processes of their fabrication; and above all, we have dedicated ourselves mainly to the study of family and social organization, the description of which is the object of the present work.
- 114 It is superfluous to stress that an exhaustive study of the life and society of the Nambikwara will not be found here. We were only able to share the life of the Indians during the nomadic period, and that alone would be enough to limit the extent of our research. A trip undertaken during the sedentary period would no doubt furnish some important information, and would permit correcting the general perspective. We hope to be able to undertake this some day. As Roquette Pinto wrote at the beginning of Rondonia: "Lentas hão de ser sempre as construções científicas em tal terreno". ["Scientific building in such country must always be slow."] (1) His book, however, must always

1. Prefacio da Segunda Edição, p. 13.

be merited with having called attention to one of the most interesting cultures of indigenous Brazil and having been the first to produce a lively and charming picture of it.

- 131 The territory occupied by the Nambikwara Indians extends from the
- 133 Papagaio River in the east to a zone in the northwest ending approximately at the junction of the Commemoração de Floriano and Barão de Melgaço Rivers, both branches of the Machado River or Gi-Parana. This point marks, at the same time, the end of the plateau which occupies nearly the entire central and western parts of the state of Mato Grosso. The southern boundary is placed at the middle course of the Guaporé River, and, farther to the west, it follows the entire course of the Commemoração de Floriano River. The location of the northern

101 where the town of Villa Bella de Mato Grosso, three quarters abandoned,
 161 must have undergone several attacks by unknown Indians, during the
 same period, but whom the rare residents also call by the name of
 Kabixi. According to our informants, this group in itself still had
 700 or 800 individuals of whom we encountered a dozen in September
 1938 (1). The other groups decreased rapidly, by epidemics, and

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1. See below, p. 52.

owing to their feeble birth rate which constitutes a general phenomenon
 as will be seen in the chapter dedicated to the analysis of each group.

. . .

114 All by himself, Roquette Pinto has attempted a classification of
 101 the Nambikwara. He distinguishes four groups. To the southeast,
 197 the Kokozu, who live near the Juruena, Juina, Papagaio and Camararé
 Rivers; to the northeast, the Anunzé, who occupy the basin of the
 Doze de Otubro River; to the southwest, a group called Uaintaçu or
 Kabixi, extending from Campos Novos to the valley of the Guaporé.
 Finally, to the northwest, from the west bank of the Doze de Otubro
 River to the valley of the Roosevelt River, is found a final group con-
 sisting of the Tagnani, Tauté, Saluma, Taruté, Taschuité. Roquette
 Pinto does not clearly indicate on what basis this classification is
 founded. One can assume that it is not purely linguistic, since the
 vocabularies published in Rondonia contain only three dialects. With-
 out doubt, a good deal of empiricism is involved. Besides, the list
 of groups which is found in the publications of Rondon and his col-
 laborators only occasionally corresponds to the classification of
 Roquette Pinto. Our own lists of names of groups do not include all
 those cited by our precursors; but they reveal several new names. At
 the same time, we have brought up some dialects which had never
 been mentioned. It is thus too early to proceed to a definitive classi-
 fication, and farther on will be found the reasons for these uncertainties.
 The nomad bands of the Nambikwara are of fragile formation, and
 they all possess a name, a surname derived from the system of parent-
 age or owed to the malice of a neighboring group. Thus the names
 appear, disappear, or are transmitted with surprising facility. Here
 is a good example of disagreement [8] between observers working
 in different periods: Somewhere, between 1926 and 1928, Max
 Schmidt collected a short vocabulary of 20 words, which he pub-
 lished later on (1) as having been obtained from a group called

- 101 Tamaindé, then installed at Tres Buritis. This vocabulary certainly
 • 114 comes from group b2 of our classification, who are distinguished by
 197 the usage of a verbal suffix of the form -fore, and which we have also
 found in the region of Tres Buritis. However, in 1938, the users of
 this same dialect called themselves by the name Taiaté, and the
 name Tamaindé was only used by a group speaking a different dialect
 (b1) to point out a third group (c of our classification), and one may
 doubt that its dialect even belongs to the Nambikwara linguistic
 family.
- 121 What conclusions may be drawn? Any attempt at classification
 based on the names of bands, whether they be chosen by the band or
 received from neighboring groups is condemned to failure in advance.
 The only sound basis for a classification of bands and groups can be
 linguistic. In any case, this method will be the only valid one as
 long as study carried on during the rainy season will not permit the
 establishment of larger and more stable units than the nomadic bands
 of the dry season. As it would be difficult and arbitrary to call each
 [22] dialect by the temporary name of such and such a band who spoke it
 at the moment when the research was being carried on, and as a classi-
 fication undertaken on the basis of present knowledge could only be
 provisional, we shall proceed with the aid of symbols, in preference
 to the names of groups which would give a false picture of reality.
- 197 This having been stated, it can be said that the Nambikwara lin-
 guistic family includes three principal groups of which two are sub-
 divided into sub-groups. There are in all five distinct units. The two
 groups that we designate respectively by a and b are closely related
 from a semantic and morphological point of view, and they incon-
 testably represent two modulations of the same language. In the two
 cases one observes the same usage of classificatory suffixes, with a
 verbal suffix whose meaning is "to be," "to become," "to do," "to
 make." In the dialect of group a, this verbal suffix appears in the
 forms -kedjutu, -kedutsu -ki'titu. One should distinguish a type a1,
 predominant from the Papagaio to the Juina River, with an ending -u
 for nouns, and a type a2 which tends to substitute an ending -e for
 the preceding. As this last group is found to the west of the other,
 and it occupies approximately the region from the sources of the
 Doze de Otubro River and the Camararé River, it appears likely that
 the ending -e has appeared under the influence of dialect b. Apart
 from the ending and several variations in vocabulary, the dialects a1
 and a2 are practically identical.

The vocabularies of groups a and b diverge more seriously. The
 latter also presents an ending -e for nouns, and some [9] new forms
 for the verbal suffix. On that latter basis, one should distinguish a

601 between systems a and c. It constitutes a sort of transition between
 582 the simple, symmetrical and harmonious system of the eastern groups
 184 and the more subtle and complex structure of the northern system.
 This role corresponds well to the respective geographic positions occupied by the different groups.

CONCRETE STUDY OF THE GROUPS.

601 The concrete functioning of the kinship systems previously analyzed has been studied in the following groups:

I. Eastern group (dialect a).

621 (1) Dialect a 1. -A group of 23 individuals composed of six men, nine women, and eight children. This group was found to be temporarily enlarged by the meeting, and sometimes even the temporary combining of bands, whose members present among themselves, and as concerns the first group, analogous kinship relationships. Thus, group (1) was found to be temporarily increased to the point of including 75 individuals (20 men, 30 women, and 25 children).

(2) Dialect a2. -Several small units each including 6 to 12 individuals.

II. South-central group (dialect b1).

A stable group of 17 individuals composed of five men, six women and six children, temporarily increased, by the meeting with relatives, to 31 individuals (13 men, 10 women, and 8 children).

III. Western group (dialect b2).

A group of 12 individuals composed of four men, five women, and three children.

IV. Northern group (dialect c).

A stable group of 34 individuals composed of 9 men, 11 women and 14 children.

128 The concrete study of the groups will be based on the eastern
 114 group a1 (restricted) and on the central group b1 (restricted), the only ones with whom we have lived long enough to set forth a psycho-sociological analysis.

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two types of solidarity, the one, mechanical and expressed by the term brother, and the other, organic, expressed by the term brother-in-law. We have alluded to this above, p. 71.

- 114 One might object that the old authors might have interpreted doubtful observations in the light of European facts. As we shall propose [84] the name of compèrage to designate an institution which we believe to be authentically Indian, it will be useful to stop for a moment at this aspect of the problem.

Without doubt the facts analyzed above, and the European institution of compèrage [compaternity] offer striking analogies. At the beginning, the godfather and the godmother were connected with one another, and both of them to the parents of the child, by the mystic bonds of sponsorship. But the relationship soon became secularized in all the small rural communities, or, more exactly, everywhere where the family grouping takes precedence over the extended social group. The relationship is then employed to establish an artificial kinship line, or even, as happens among the Nambikwara to translate in kinship terms a simple phenomenon of spatial contiguity. (1) The strangers, the newcomers, are adopted

1. This derivation is well brought to light by etymology: in English, god-sib becomes gossip.

thanks to the reciprocal usage of the appellations of godfather and godmother which they receive from—and return to—their contemporaries. On the other hand, the stranger usually assimilates himself by taking a wife in his new community, and the terms godfather and brother-in-law become synonyms so rapidly that the men allied by marriage only call one another by the first. In the villages of Mediterranean Europe and of Latin America, the godfather or "compadre" is an actual or potential brother-in-law. That in certain regions of Central or South America the analogy between the Indian and European institutions has aided the first to establish and modernize itself is not doubtful. Thus, in Mexico, the primitive institution of the moşte, that is, obligation, for the heads of families to exchange presents periodically now functions in the framework of the relations of "compadres," the Spanish term offering a convenient translation of the ancient Otomi. (2)

2. Jacques Soustelle, La famille Otomi-Pame du Mexique central, Paris, Institut D'Ethnologie, 1937.

●114 But the formal analogy of the two institutions should not disguise
601 their truly opposite characters. In the Latin-Mediterranean society
the bond, formerly mystic and now social, of comperage, can be
[17] transformed by marriage into an actual kinship line. Among the
ancient Tupi, and among the Nambikwara, it is, on the contrary,
the concrete kinship which furnished its model to a type of bond
utilized to establish wider relationships.

That having been posed, there are two reasons why our authors
could not have elaborated a pseudo-Indian institution after a Euro-
pean model. In the first place, men as familiar with religious
problems as were Yves d'Evreux, Cardim and Lery, could not have
likened a relationship whose first consequence, and the probable
object, was to permit new types of marriage, to the relationship be-
tween godfather, godmother and relatives who observed very severe
enforcement [85] of the prohibitions of marriage, especially since
the thirteenth century. At the time when they were writing, the
question had actuality, since it was set down in the program of the
Council of Trent, where the ancient rules had to be a little softened.
But we have a more decisive argument. From the arrival of the first
missionaries, the two institutions, European and Indian, must have
evolved side by side, especially among the baptized Indians. But
neither they nor their European priests ever interpreted Christian
sponsorship in terms of Indian compaternity. On the contrary, and
more logically since the newly introduced institution carried restric-
tions regarding marriage, they treated it as a modality of the relation-
ship of paternity. They likened the godfather to a classificatory
father: "Thus, they (the children who come to receive baptism)
regarded their godfathers as their real fathers and called them Cherou,
meaning "my father," the French called them Cheaire, which means
"my son," and the little girls Cheagire, "my daughter" ... (1)

1. Yves d'Evreux, 1. c., II, 1, p. 234.

607 We believe we have assembled enough information concerning
the fundamental character of the relationship between brothers-in-
law in the South American society so that the nucleus of an original
institution of compaternity can be seen in it which appears still living
among the Nambikwara. The documents here presented suggest (2)

2. An English version of these observations has been
published under the title: "The social use of kinship

621 security and marital possibilities are endangered it will unite with some other band.

161 According to the missionaries who live in the area, the number of individuals in each band of the Eastern Nambicuara are as follows: Waklitisu, 18; Kitánhlu, 45; Elótasu, 17; Chiwáisu, 50. Old census figures give the population of the Western Nambicuara as 500, but the missionaries assured me that they doubted whether even half as many exist today. It must be remembered that an epidemic of measles or "grippe" can diminish the population very rapidly. Syphilis and tuberculosis also exist among them. Judging from the physical appearance of the individuals and their general attitude toward life, it appears that the Eastern Nambicuara, at least, are dying out rapidly.

114 According to Roquette-Pinto, perhaps the earliest visitor to the territory now occupied by the Nambicuara was Antonio Pires do Campo, who went north up the Sepotuba River, which he called Hisipotuba, between 1718 and 1723, and in all likelihood reached the headwaters of the Sacre and Papagaio Rivers. In his Breve Noticia published in 1746, he mentions the Caviro Indians living in the valleys of the rivers running northward into the Amazon River.

Some years later Padre Ayres de Casal mentions a tribe living on the Juruna River, a territory long occupied by the Nambicuara. From 1800 on, rumors about the Indians living in this area increased. In 1862, Dr. Amedée Moure published a monograph on the Indians of Mato Grosso in which he devoted a chapter to the 10 savage, man-eating tribes, among whom he listed the Umotina, Cabixi, Nambicuara, and the Tapanuma (Roquette-Pinto, 1938, pp. 26-51).

648 The first reliable accounts of the Nambicuara date from 1907 to 1912, the period when General Rondon was putting up the telegraph line between Cuiabá and Porto Velho. In 1912, Roquette-Pinto visited the Nambicuara and the Pareusi, and later published the results of his investigations in his book entitled "Rondonia." This book undoubtedly is the first anthropologically competent report about the Nambicuara. After 1910, small Government Indian Posts were established, one at Tolosa on the upper Cravari River, a short distance east of Utiariti, and another called Pyreneus de Sousa between Campos Novos and

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In 1949, Kaoro Onaga, under the supervision of Dr. Oberg, measured 23 Umotina (14 males, 8 females), 13 Eastern Nambicuará (7 males, 6 females) of the Waklitian band, and 5 Iranxe males. The Umotina were measured at Barra dos Bugres, the Nambicuará and Iranxe at Utiarity. Small as these series are, they represent relatively large samples of the groups from which they are drawn. The total Umotina population is about 65, with 34 adults (see p. 106); the Waklitian band numbers only 18, and the Eastern Nambicuará together total only about 130 (see p. 86). No figures on the Iranxe are available but they are definitely a remnant group.

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The drastic reduction of even the most secluded aboriginal populations in Brazil enhances the value of physical studies already made on them. The present contribution to the physical anthropology of northern Mato Grosso may be added to the earlier studies by Ehrenreich (1897), Ranke (1910), and Roquette-Pinto (1935). In addition, the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro has unpublished physical data on some of the Upper Xingú tribes, particularly the Camayurá. Vellard (see Imbelloni, 1948, p. 237, *ftn.*) has unpublished information on three Nambicuará bands. Willems (personal communication) is in the possession of measurements on 40 male Tápírapá. A careful analysis of all these studies should go far in rounding out the physical anthropology of northern Mato Grosso. In the meantime, I have endeavored to fit the Umotina, Nambicuará, and Iranxe series into the existing knowledge of the area.

[p. 128 (8)]

Abstract.

Little has hitherto been known of the Nambiquára who inhabit the valley of the Juruena and are spread thence to the rivers Sararé and Galéra, affluents of the Guaporé. In 1909, an official Brazilian explorer, Colonel Rondon, during his journey in the interior of Matto Grosso, was able to enter into friendly relations with them, collecting ethnological objects, and gathering information of their life, geographical distribution and customs, with those also of the Pareci. 131 114

The Pareci give the names Uáikoákoré and Ouihanieré to the Nambiquára, thus dividing them into two groups. Individuals of the latter group have darker skins and are more warlike. Colonel Rondon appears to have cleared up the meaning of the name Kabixi, which has been a cause of confusion, as often happens with collective names like Bugre, Tapuya, Guaycurú and others. The dwellers in Villa Bella (Matto Grosso) were accustomed to call Kabixi those Indians whom the Pareci called Uáikoákoré, and who, as now stated, are Nambiquára. This name of Uáikoákoré is given by the Pareci of the sub-tribes Xaxinití and Uaimaré of the rivers Arinos, Sacuriú-iná, Tahura-iná and Timalatíá to their kindred of the Mazáriní group who inhabit the upper parts of the Rio Verde, the Juba, Cabaçal and Jauxú. The term Kabixi is derogatory, implying an inferior condition. 101 [184]

The Nambiquára are usually of medium height; they have large teeth, the abdomen rather prominent, muscular thighs, slender legs and well made feet. They perforate the nostrils, the nasal septum and the ear-lobes. Through the holes made in the nose they pass small pieces of wood, and from the ear lobes they hang ornaments made of small beads of coconut. They wear armlets, bracelets, leg ornaments and bead collars made from the fruit of the mbacúba. They live by the chase, but also plant maize, yams, potatoes, mandioc, and beans. They smoke leaves similar to Brazilian tobacco and do not use hammocks but sleep on the ground, like the Campa-atzíri and the Amúésa of the Gran Pajonal. 142 301 [304] 241 276 513

In the collection made by Colonel Rondon for the National Museum at Rio de Janeiro there is an alimentary paste similar to the Kêthê of the Pareci, made from pounded mandioc. The native *bren* or bitumen is used with string to fasten arrow points to their shafts. It appears to be a mixture of Oanini and wax, and is preserved in leaves of the Malé-malé palm. It melts at a very low temperature. 252 381 [411]

To fell trees a stone axe, fixed in a wooden handle by means of cord and bitumen, is used. The Indian who succeeds in felling certain trees with this primitive instrument receives as reward an arara or mutúm feather for a nose-ornament. Such a decoration is usually reserved for warlike prowess among the natives of Brazil. The bows are large, strong, of red wood and well-polished, with semi-cylindrical transversal section. Those in the Rondon collection vary from 1m. 80 to 2m. 38 in length. To draw an arrow of 50cm. between the larger bow and its string of tucum a traction force of 60 kilos. is necessary, as verified by the dynamometer. There are five types of arrows. They have two musical instruments, one, a double flute made of two pieces of bamboo tied together, the other, two concave disks of calabash, about 8 cm. in diameter, united at the edges by a strip of Malé-malé and bren. The upper disk has three orifices. 412 [301] 554 411 [47] 534

lateral or the patrilineal cross cousin; nevertheless, the chosen interpretation stresses the male side in Nambikuara society, or, let us say, it shows a strong tendency in this direction. At the same time we can see in such a solution a specifically social structure beginning to superimpose itself on the formerly simple familial units. 571 607 582

We do not intend in any way to base a theory of the origin of dual organizations on these restricted observations, the character of which is mainly anecdotal. However, this is a case where "the characteristic features of the sib organization are in some measure prefigured among sibless tribes";¹ as a matter of fact, in order to fulfil the main requirements of a system of exogamic moieties, it would be sufficient for the new unit, once fixed, to retain the recollection of its dual origin by preserving the habit of not mingling the camp fires. 571 607

Moreover, the extension of the "brother-in-law" relationship provides an instance of the increasingly superior position of the men within the group, since it is through the men that group alliances are brought about, just as wars are waged by men. 571 607 562

The preceding observations have a further value, since with their help we may be able to interpret sociological information found in the older literature on South America, especially that dealing with the Tupi of the Brazilian coast. 000

There are striking similarities between several features of the Nambikuara kinship system and what may be inferred about the ancient familial organization of the coastal Tupi. When describing small details of Nambikuara daily life, one is often tempted to quote Jean de Léry or Yves d'Evreux, so accurately do their words apply to certain live features of Nambikuara society, notwithstanding the fact that they were written four centuries before this culture became known. As a matter of fact, several metaphysical themes are common to both cultures and, indeed, certain names in the Nambikuara religious vocabulary have a conspicuously Tupi origin. The most important similarities, however, are those involving the kinship systems. In both cultures the same three principles of familial organization are stressed and are apparently similarly expressed: First the dichotomy of the parents' brothers and sisters between parallel uncles and aunts, called "fathers" and "mothers," and cross uncles and aunts, called "fathers-in-law" and "mothers-in-law;" secondly, the marriage of cross cousins with the correlative assimilation of parallel cousins to "brothers" and "sisters"; and, finally, the avuncular marriage, which, among the ancient Tupi, seems to have taken the form of a preferential union between the mother's brother and the sister's daughter. 114 171 601

An excellent text by Anchieta gives evidence of the occurrence of the first principle, as well as showing signs of the existence of the other two: 114 171

¹ Robert H. Lowie, *Family and Sib* (AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, Vol. 21), p. 28.

- 114 In questions of relationship they never use the word *ele* (true) since they call their father's brothers "father," their brothers' sons "son," and their father's brothers' sons "brother"; when they wish to designate their actual father or son, they say *xeruba xemonhangara* "my father who engendered me," or, for a son, *xeraira xeremimohanga* "my son whom I engendered." I never heard an Indian call his wife *xeremireco ele*, but simply *xeremireco* or *xeracig* "mother of my children," and I never heard a woman refer to her husband as *xemencle* "real husband," but simply *xemena* or *xemembira ruba* "father of my children." They use these terms indifferently for their husband or lover. If the husband calls one of his wives *xeremireco ele*, he means the most esteemed or best loved wife and she is often the last one he took.²

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842 This text also shows that the Tupi encountered a difficulty in their kinship system, namely, how to distinguish the classificatory parents or children from the consanguineous ones. This stresses the structural similarity between their kinship system and that of the Nambikuara, since the latter met with the same problem. Apparently the Tupi, like the Nambikuara, felt no need for special terms, but when it was necessary, made comments based on physiological considerations. When the Nambikuara are asked to point out the real status of their consanguineous children, they add to the name for "son" or "daughter" another word, the meaning of which is "child" or "little one." The physiological implication of this new term is perfectly clear, since it is ordinarily used to designate newly born animals, while the former terms are applied only to relationships within the human family. Complementary indications regarding the assimilation of the father's brother to a classificatory father may be found in Soares de Sousa.³

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171 The old authors give numerous examples of cross cousin marriage and of marriages between uncles and nieces. Here again Anchieta will be our main source:

Though many Indians have several nieces, and very attractive indeed, nevertheless they do not use them as wives. However, brothers have such authority over sisters that they consider their nieces as belonging to them and that they are entitled to marry them and to use them ad libitum if they wish. In the same way they give their sisters to some and refuse them to others. Taragoaj, an important chief of the village of Jaribatiba in the plain of San Vicente, had two wives one of whom was his niece, his sister's daughter.⁴

Both types of marriage are treated as symmetrical institutions in the same document: "... because the fathers give them the daughters and the brothers the sisters. . . ." Furthermore, cross cousin marriage is referred to by Staden:

² *Informação dos Casamentos dos Índios do Brasil* (Revista Trimestral del Instituto Historico e Geographico Brasileiro, T. 8, 1846, 1 2da Serie), p. 259.

³ *Roteiro do Brasil* (Revista do Instituto Historico e Geographico Brasileiro, T. 14, 1851), pp. 316-317.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 259.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

"They make presents also of their daughters and sisters . . .",⁶ by Soares de Sousa,⁷ Claude d'Abbeville,⁸ and others. With a sound sociological feeling, Anchieta establishes a link between the custom of a man marrying his sister's daughter and the recognition of the male as the only one responsible for conception, a theory also shared by the Nambikuara. On this matter, Anchieta writes:

They call the brothers' daughters "daughter" and treat them as such. Therefore they would not have sexual intercourse with them, since they believe that the true kinship link has its origin in the father, whom they consider the only agent, while the mother, according to them, is merely a container in which the children are formed. . . . For that reason too, they use the sisters' daughters "ad copulam" without sin. . . . For the same reason, the father will give his daughters in marriage to their uncles, their mother's brothers, a thing which, until now, was never done with the nephew who is the brother's son. . . .⁹

Cross cousin marriage seems to have a very wide distribution throughout South America.¹⁰ But among the Tupi avuncular marriage in particular aroused the interest of early travellers. For instance, Léry notices: "As to the uncle, he marries his niece";¹¹ and Thevet: "As soon as they are born, the maternal uncle lifts them from the ground and keeps them for his future wives."¹² Magalhaes de Gandavo expresses himself as follows:

It is their custom to marry the women who are their nieces, the daughters of their brothers or sisters; these are considered their legitimate and true wives. Fathers of the women cannot refuse them, nor can any persons other than their uncles marry them.¹³

But this statement seems to be doubly inaccurate. For other references to the same phenomenon one may turn to Nobrega,¹⁴ Vasconcellos,¹⁵ and Soares de Sousa.¹⁶

⁶ Hans Staden, *The true History of his Captivity* (Ed. Malcolm Letts, London, Vol. II, Ch. 18), p. 146.

⁷ *Tratado Descritivo do Brasil em 1587*, nova edição (São Paulo, 1938. Cap. CLVII).

⁸ *Histoire de las Mission*. . . (Paris, 1614).

⁹ *Loc. cit.*, pp. 259-206. The same interpretation is made by Manoel de Nobrega, *Cartas do Brasil 1549-1560, Cartas Jesuíticas I* (Publ. da Academia Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro, 1931).

¹⁰ For instance, Breton gives clear evidence of its occurrence among the Antillean Caribs: "First cousins whom we call father's brother's sons call each other 'brothers' and the father's brothers are also called 'fathers.' The children of brothers do not marry, but they may contract marriages with the children of their father's sisters." *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-François* (Auxerre, 1665), p. 11.

¹¹ *Voyage fait en la Terre du Brasil*, ed. Gaffarel. (Paris, 1880. Vol. 2, ch. 17), p. 85.

¹² *Cosmogonie Universelle*, p. 932.

¹³ Pedro de Magalhaes de Gandavo, *The Histories of Brazil* (The Cortes Society, New York, 1922. II, ch. 10), p. 89.

¹⁴ *Cartas do Brasil*. *Loc. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁵ *Chronica da Companhia de Jesu do Estado do Brasil* (Lisboa, 1865. I, 82), p. 133.

¹⁶ *Tratado*, pp. 157, 152.

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171 Regarding polygyny and the sharp differentiation made among the Nambikuara between the first wife who devotes herself to feminine activities and the younger wives who are their husband's companions and share his tasks, it may be recalled that Magalhaes de Gandavo¹⁷ refers to a special category of women, single indeed, who shared in masculine activities.¹⁸

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114 The preceding similarities may perhaps allow us to establish a valid comparison between our observations concerning the extension of the "brother-in-law" relationship among the Nambikuara and what seems to have been a very similar institution among the ancient Tupi. We first quote Yves d'Evreux:

They scattered part of the French through the villages so that they might live according to the custom of the land, which consists in having *chetouasap*, that is to say, hosts or god-sibs (*compères*), giving them merchandise instead of money. Such hospitality or god-sib relationship is very close among them, for they regard you as their child as long as you stay with them. They hunt and fish for you and, what is more, they used to give their daughters to their god-sibs (*compères*).¹⁹

The same author refers later to the "French who were established in the villages in a god-sib relationship (*compérage*)."²⁰ Evidence of the aboriginal institution may also be found in Jean de Léry:

It is worth remarking that the words *atour-assap* and *colon-assap* differ, because the first signifies a perfect alliance between them and between them and us, so much so that the belongings of the one are common to the other. And also that they cannot have the daughter or sister of the first named.²¹

From this one may infer, conversely, that marriage is authorized with the sister and the daughter of the *colon-assap*. Therefore, the *colon-assap* is granted a double privilege: first, marriage with his partner's sister, which makes him a "brother-in-law"; and, secondly, marriage with his partner's daughter, which is equivalent to his assimilation to the rank of "maternal uncle";—then, because he is considered a theoretical brother of his partner's wife, he also becomes a theoretical brother-in-law. Actually, therefore, both privileges have the same result.

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582 One more similarity between the Tupi and Nambikuara brother-in-law relationship remains to be pointed out. All the texts quoted agree that there existed among the Tupi a kind of authority held by young men over their

¹⁷ *Loc. cit.*, II, ch. 10, p. 89.

¹⁸ Other indications on the familial organization of the ancient Tupi may be found in: Métraux, *La Religion des Tupinambas* (Paris, Leroux, 1928), *passim*; Lafone Quevedo, *Guarani Kinship Terms as an Index of Social Organization* (AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, Vol. 21, 1919), pp. 421-440; Kirchhoff, *Die Verwandtschaftsorganisation der Urvölkstämme Südamerikas* (Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, Vol. 63, 1931, ch. 15), p. 182.

¹⁹ *Voyage dans le Nord du Brésil*, ed. F. Denis (Leipzig et Paris, 1864, II), p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XXVIII, p. 109.

²¹ *Loc. cit.*, II, ch. 20, p. 133. Cf. also Cardim, *Tratados da Terra e Gente do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1925), pp. 169-170.

171 The objection may be raised that the old authors have interpreted inaccurate observations in the light of European data. Since we shall suggest the use of the word *compérage*—borrowed from the French—to identify the institution, which we consider to be an authentic aboriginal one, it will be useful to discuss briefly this aspect of the problem.

Without any doubt there is a striking analogy between the facts related above and the Latin-European institution of *compérage*. Originally the *compère* and the *commère* were connected with each other, and both with the child's parents, through the mystical link of parrainage. However, the relation was very soon secularized in all small rural communities, or rather, wherever the familial structures were of greater importance than the social ones; it was then used to establish an artificial link of kinship, or, more precisely, as is the case among the Nambikuara, to express in kinship terms a purely external relationship of spatial promiscuity.²³ The stranger or newcomer was adopted by means of the reciprocal appellation of *compère* or *commère* which he received from—and returned to—his male adult contemporaries. On the other hand, since the stranger usually assimilated himself to the group by marrying within his new community, the terms *compère* and "brother-in-law" soon became synonymous, so that men allied by marriage usually called each other only by the first term. In all small communities of Mediterranean Europe and of Latin America, the *compère* or *compadre* is an actual or a potential brother-in-law. No doubt in certain regions of Central and South America the analogy between the European and aboriginal institution has helped the latter to become fixed and modernized. Thus, in Mexico the primitive institution of the *molte*, that is, of the heads of families bound to exchange gifts at certain periods, now expresses itself by means of the "compadre" relationship, the Spanish term providing an easy translation of the earlier Otomi.²⁴ The formal analogy between the institutions cannot hide, however, the fact that they are really opposite in character. In Latin-Mediterranean society, the formerly mystical and, actually, social link of *compérage* may be changed, through marriage, into a real kinship tie. Among the ancient Tupi, as among the Nambikuara, the actual kinship provides the type of link used to establish wider relations.

114 This being admitted, there are two strong reasons why our authorities cannot have constructed a pseudo-institution based on a European pattern from 171 inconsistent observations. In the first place, men as well acquainted with religious problems as were Yves d'Evreux, Cardim and Léry could not have as- 174 similated a relationship whose first consequence and probable aim was to per-

²³ The same sociological derivation is expressed in English through the etymological origin of the word "gossip" (god-sib).

²⁴ Jacques Soustelle, *La Famille Otomi-Pame du Mexique Central* (Paris, Institut d'Ethnologie, 1937).

mit new forms of marriage to the relationship between godfathers and parents, the main purpose of which, especially since the thirteenth century, had been to impose new and very rigid restrictions upon marriage. At the time they were writing, the matter was of immediate interest and was being discussed by the Council of Trent, where the earlier rules were somewhat mitigated. But there is a much stronger argument: From the moment of the arrival of the European missionaries both institutions, the European and the aboriginal, actually co-existed among the Indians, at least among those who were baptized, and neither they nor their European priests ever interpreted the Christian "god-father" relationship in terms of the native "brother-in-law" institution. On the contrary, and much more logically, since the new relationship placed restrictions on marriage, they considered it as a modality of the relation of paternity; thus, they assimilated the "god-father" to a classificatory "father."

They [the newly baptized children] regarded their god-fathers as their true fathers and called them *Cherou*, that is to say, "my father," and the French called them *Cheaire*, that is to say, "my son," and the little girls *Cheagire*, "my daughter." . . ."

Therefore, it cannot be doubted that the *compérage* is quite distinct from its European parallel.

A sufficient number of convergent indications have been recorded so that we may consider the outstanding character of the "brother-in-law" relationship a specific feature of South American sociology, constituting the core of an original institution of *compérage* which appears clearly among the Nambikuara and which, as suggested by the documents presented in this article, may formerly have had a much wider distribution on the continent.

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■ Yves d'Évreux, *loc. cit.*, II, I, p. 234.

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[17] The disease of the overos is in fact equivalent to the vaurana of our Tupian Indians, and actually the same as the "Carate disease" of Colombia, the "spotted disease," lota in Central America or purupuru in the Amazon.

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[186] Spix and Martius at the beginning of the last century, and after them other naturalists, found the disease spread out through the great valley. Many chroniclers dealt with it, Baena in greatest detail.

"Purupuru," [wrote Spix and Martius], "is the name given by the Brazilians to those Indians who are really called Pamaouiri and who live on the Purus River."

They described the disease of the "Pamaouiri" (or Paumary as they are called today), listing as its major characteristic the presence of irregular skin spots, isolated or converging, blackish, and somewhat coarse to the touch.

Martius believed that some white spots occasionally found among the black ones represented the initial stage of the disease.

He thought that purupuru was hereditary, although its external manifestations appeared only after puberty. The Indians Martius met attributed the disease to "a bad condition of the blood"; and the naturalist believed that the "amphibious life" of these people, their food and some of their customs had a great deal to do with the coming forth of purupuru.

Later, through dissemination of the disease, the name came to designate all the tribes of the Purus-Juruá region: Paumary, Yuberi, Arua, etc.

About twenty years ago, Ehrenreich noted certain curious facts about the manifestations of purupuru. He confirmed that the disease only develops after puberty. He found some Indians whose feet and hands were entirely white, giving the impression of a partial albinism or a kind of vitiligo.

According to Ehrenreich, the spots have a grayish blue color in the first stage of the disease. As the edges whiten, the center becomes darker.

[187] He personally never observed the scaling of affected areas. But he relates popular reports to the effect that the Paumary

164 secretly mix the scales from their skin with the food and water of their
114 neighbors so that the disease may affect them too.

He adds that no hair grows on the white spots. The itching is always intensive.

In 1909, Koch-Grünberg wrote of the purupuru found in the valley of the Rio Negro. In accordance with the Indians' views he distinguished three varieties of the disease, white, black, and red, depending on the predominant coloring of the spots. Koch-Grünberg says that the black spots are hard and coarse, the white ones smooth and similar in aspect to burns.

However, Oswaldo Cruz (1) stated in 1913 that there is no

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1. Oswaldo Cruz, Relatorio sobre as condições medico-sanitarias do vale do Amazonas [Report on the Medical and Sanitary Conditions of the Amazon Valley], Ministry of Agriculture (Rio, 1913).

justification for this division into three varieties. He considers the white spots to constitute a more advanced stage of the disease and to result from the elimination of skin pigment by an infectious agent.

Oswaldo Cruz also noted scaling around the black spots.

Already in 1886, Hirsch (2) had stated that purupuru could only

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2. A. Hirsch, Handbuch der historisch-geographischen Pathologie [Handbook of Historical and Geographical Pathology] (1886).

be a dermatomycosis. The studies of Montoya y Flores (3) and

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3. J. B. Montoya y Flores, "Recherches sur les Caratés de Colombie [Studies on the Carate of Colombia]" (Paris, 1893); Archives de Parasitologie, Vol. 2; "Notes sur les Caratés" [Notes on the Carate], Ann. de Derm. et de Syphil. (1897).

164 Oswaldo Cruz, though not yet conclusive, seem to justify this
47 hypothesis.

[188] The Indians of the Serra do Norte live on tributaries of the Amazon, and consequently in the vicinity of the extensive area where purupuru has been found. Yet they are indisputably free from the disease. Their isolation has protected them.

Bãanêcêdútú bears some similarity to ringworm (herpes circinatus) and also to tokelau (tinea imbricata).

[114] In 1897 Ehrenreich confused these two diseases and stated that they are frequent among the Indians of the tropical zone.

Ringworm, however, is not the same as tokelau, and these diseases are not widespread among the Indians. The latter's skin, exposed as it is to numerous disturbing factors present in the environment, is often affected by "artificial eruptions of internal or external origin" which might be confused in certain cases with parasitic diseases.

However, there is no doubt that the initial stages of the Serra do Norte skin disorder would resemble those of herpes circinatus, with their concentric circles of small cysts, if they did not lack the inflammation that goes with herpes.

Perhaps this symptom merely goes unnoticed, owing either to the thickness of the skin or to its scanty blood supply, absence of hair, small number of sebaceous glands, etc.

The subsequent manifestations of the Serra do Norte disease, however, preclude its identification with ringworm. In its final stage, the disease of the Nambicuara is much more similar to tinea imbricata.

The covering of the individual with long scales similar to strips of tissue paper, which I clearly observed among my Indians, is also ascribed to tokelau. In tokelau as in bãanêcêdútú, moreover, there is no inflammation [189] around the lesions and the hairy parts are not affected.

Tinea imbricata also begins with cystic formations, but in the Nambicuara disease the transformation of the cysts into "systems" is much more irregular. Actually there are no true "scaling systems" as in tokelau, but rather scabs surrounded by scales so small that they have a grainy appearance.

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278 Numerous travelers and physiologists have concerned themselves with curare without succeeding in exactly determining its nature and its method of preparation. For some curare is purely vegetable; for others it appears to be composed largely of animal materials. Without analyzing here all the literature on this subject, it will be enough to recall that most former authors and travelers of the past century name diverse species of *Strychnos* as the principal base of curare; many other plants belonging to various families have also been mentioned as possibly entering in this poison. The partisans of an animal or mixed origin for curare, practically all travelers, assert that the venoms of snakes, batrachians, and arachnids, and fish and insect extracts, etc... play an essential role in its preparation. Despite numerous opinions to the contrary the presence at least of certain venoms in some curares (1) is indisputable.

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1. Vellard and Assis, "Études immunologiques sur le curare /Immunological Studies on Curare/," Annales de l'Institut Pasteur. Paris, LII, 102, 1934.

Often these controversies on the composition of curare have lost sight of one essential fact. Curare is not a set substance and does not correspond to one single formula. There is not one but a number of curares, more or less complex, peculiar to each region, each tribe, and in many cases to each preparer.

Besides it is the general but false practice to call every paralyzing arrow poison of South America curare. The application of this term should be limited, in accordance with its classical physiological definition, to any poison suppressing the passage of excitations of the nerve to the muscle while preserving direct excitability of the muscle and that of the motor nerve.

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114 278 True curares are becoming difficult to find. Many of the modern products brought back as curares or existing under this name in /212/ trade are paralyzing poisons of variable toxicity but with a weak or no curarizing effect. The curarizing effect itself does not interest the Indian; he is only looking for a halting poison producing rapid paralysis with loosening of muscular tonus, no matter by what mechanism, for his arrows. Often also the good faith of travelers has been betrayed and the Indians, anxious about their secret, have given them false recipes or poisons different from true curare. Lastly, some curares are hard to preserve, making it impossible to ascertain their properties upon the return of expeditions.

These causes, so diverse, have always left doubt about the exact composition and method of preparation of curare.

I. Curare of the Nambikwara /Nambicuara/

During my last trip to the central plateau of the Mato Grosso with my colleague Lévi-Strauss, I was present at the preparation of a very simple but active curare by the Nambikwara and accompanied these Indians on the search for the necessary plants.

Curare had not been mentioned as existing among the Nambikwara. The Rondon Commission had certainly observed the existence of an arrow poison among them, but later investigations carried out on arrows sent to Rio de Janeiro had given negative results (Alvaro Ozorio de Almeida and Roquette Pinto). The cause of this failure can only be attributed to the material used in the experiments, which was too old; the arrows keep their activity only a few weeks.

278 184 The composition of curare is the same for all the Nambikwara, but its method of preparation varies from group to group. It must be emphasized that the preparation of this poison is surrounded with more mystery as one goes toward the

/212 cont. /

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184 southern boundary of the territory of these Indians toward the Amazon. Among the most remote Nambikwara, those on the right bank of the Rio Juruena whose material culture is extremely poor and who do not have a sorcerer, all the men know how to prepare curare. Among the Tagnani living in the region of Campos Novos and the Rio October 12 and the Çabanè living between the campos of Vilhena and the Rio Commémoration, the preparation of curare is reserved either for the chief or more often for the sorcerer (Çabanè). The Tamandé of the Roosevelt River have refused to give any precise information on curare, the preparation of which is the exclusive prerogative of the sorcerer; their arrow poison, which I was able to study, is identical to that of the other groups. The Nambikwara of the Cabixi River also use curare, but I did not obtain /213/ any details about its preparation from these Indians, who visited our camp but spent only one evening there.

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126 I was present at the preparation of curare for the first time among the Nambikwara of the right bank of the Rio Juruena.

• [114] Among the objects gathered for our collections were several poisoned arrows. The first experiments carried out on various animals either with the arrows or with the wash-water of the points revealed a symptomatology recalling that of curare.

[116] Our two chief informants, who were called José Maria and [117] Julio by the civilized people, were influential personages in the group and the principal authors of the massacre of the North American, Protestant mission of the Juruena in 1930.

[123] Patient negotiations led them to show me the plant used by them, and then a little later, to let me be present at the preparation of the poison itself.

Not without fear of being hoaxed, I tested the prepared product: its action was identical in every respect to that of the arrow poisons. The Nambikwara had been honest.

[114] Two months later in the campos of Vilhena the Çabanè [162] sorcerer, who belonged to the mixed group composed of the

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[162] last Çabanè-Tagnani survivors, again showed me the complete preparation of curare. All the information gathered in the various Nambikwara groups visited agrees with what I was able to observe.

In possession of these facts I prepared several times a certain quantity of curare identical to that of the Nambikwara. The action of these different samples was tested in the field in order to be used in comparison with later experiments upon the return of the mission; thus any possibility of error due to a possible alteration of these products was eliminated.

A year has gone by since this time, and the various solutions brought back have kept their activity; they made it possible to examine rigorously their curarizing properties.

Preparation of Curare

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824 Plant. Nambikwara curare is prepared with only one plant, a *Strychnos* which grows in the sandy brushwood of the central plateau of the Mato Grosso. Although not rare this species is not abundant anywhere.

It is a bush two meters high (Pl. III, A), with a rather strong stem and downward-hanging branches, more or less sarmentous and sometimes changing into tendrils at the ends; I never saw a really twining example of this species. The branches have a reddish bark, /214/ without thorns, which is covered, as is the stem, with white concretions. The leaves are elongated and small or medium in size. The species is very polymorphous. No specimen bore flowers or fruit.

The *Strychnos* group is one of the most difficult to study. Many species rarely flower, and in the absence of flowers it is often impossible to identify them.

In certain features the species of the Nambikwara is comparable to *St. medeola*. It exists in the plant collection of the Rondon Commission, but also without flowers and undetermined.